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## Food, Power, and Hierarchy: A Case Study of King Louis XIV in France

Sophie Churchill  
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FOOD, POWER, AND HIERARCHY: A CASE STUDY OF KING LOUIS XIV IN FRANCE

by

Sophie Churchill

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for graduation with Honors in the International Studies

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Cynthia Chou  
Thesis Mentor

Spring 2018

All requirements for graduation with Honors in the  
International Studies have been completed.

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Emily Wentzell  
International Studies Honors Advisor

# Food, Power, and Hierarchy

*A Case Study of King Louis XIV in France*

Sophie Churchill

Mentored by Cynthia Chou, Department of Anthropology

University of Iowa

International Studies Program



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## **Abstract**

Food and foodways are inherent aspects of everyday life but their significance is often overlooked. The importance of food is that it embodies a multitude of deeper meanings that are intrinsic to the society that is consuming it. As a key factor in the culture of France, food provides the lens to understanding larger social aspects such as power and hierarchy. This lens will be used to analyze the reign of King Louis XIV of France, who established himself as an absolute monarch.

Many works have appeared on food in France and many on the reign of King Louis XIV. Nevertheless, there is a gap in research to examine how a study of food might provide insight into the power of Louis XIV and hierarchy during a monarchy. By examining the symbolism of food, the cooks who prepared the food, and the etiquette surrounding French banquets, I argue that King Louis XIV used banquets as a way to manipulate others and establish power.

## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Aim**

The aim of this thesis is to examine how King Louis XIV used banquets as a way to institute power and hierarchy during his reign. Food and foodways are seemingly mundane, yet they can tell us an abundance of information about those consuming the food. Mintz and Du Bois (2002: 99) state that, “We contend that the study of food and eating is important both for its own sake since food is utterly essential to human existence (and often insufficiently available) and because the subfield has proved valuable for debating and advancing anthropological theory and research methods”. One of the ways in which food is used beyond meeting a biological need as suggested is to use it to construct one’s power. Louis XIV coined himself as the absolute monarch, meaning he had all the power in order to rule France. During his reign, he hosted a multitude of banquets which offered an array of foods in abundant quantities. This eventually led to a national pride revolving around cooking in France. As Wagoner (1957: 342) states, “French is, after all, the international language of cookery”. I argue that the banquets of King Louis XIV played a key role in his position of power.

For the purposes of this thesis, the definition of food amalgamates the ideas of two scholars, namely Claude Fischler and Arjun Appadurai. Fischler (1988: 275) states that, “food is central to our sense of identity. The way any given human group eats helps to assert its diversity [and] hierarchy...and at the same time both its oneness and the otherness of whoever eats differently”. This eloquently explains how food is universal, yet individual. The second definition to be used is from Appadurai (1981: 494) who argues that food is both “a highly condensed social fact” and “a marvelously plastic kind of collective representation” with the

“capacity to mobilize strong emotions”. He underscores that unlike other social facts, food evokes particular meanings that extend beyond its initial purpose. From these definitions, we see that food, as a social fact provides a medium through which individual diversity can be asserted within a larger group identity. Foodways encompass our understanding of everything surrounding eating, including what, when, and how.

In order to understand how food permeates larger, overarching societal structures such as power and hierarchy, it is imperative to examine the smaller, day to day activities that are the ultimate reality of a country and its people. These activities include the production and making of food. Through the processes of food production many different sectors of society are involved. According to Brillat-Savarin (1826: 61):

Gastronomy is the analytical knowledge of everything related to man’s eating. Its aim is to ensure the presentation of mankind by means of the best possible nutrition. It achieves this aim through firm principles that guide all those who research, provide or prepare those things that can be converted into food. And so it is this that in all truth motivates the farmers, the winegrowers, the fishermen, the hunters and the vast family of cooks, whatever the title or qualification use to describe their work on the preparation of food (Translated by Drouard 2007:266).

This passage illustrates how all-encompassing food is from the production until ingestion. Without the cooperation of all these farmers, winegrowers, fishermen, hunters, and cooks, it would not be possible for the others to operate and this continues all the way through the social hierarchy. Similarly, a banquet is an impossible feat unless the farmers, cooks, and servers do not all contribute in their respective areas of expertise. Not everyone can attend the banquet as a

guest or be part of the royal family but through these processes, the banquet meal incorporates a larger portion of society.

### **Methods of Data Collection**

I used two primary modes of data collection when researching for this thesis. The primary medium that provided the most information across all disciplines concerning French food and King Louis XIV respectively was online research. I used various databases for this including JSTOR and the University of Iowa online library. I found a wealth of publications that discussed either the history of Louis XIV or French foodways. However, I had to piece together research from each spectrum for my purposes. The publications found online were relatively new, all of them dating after the 1950s. The online research supplied journal articles that were used to amalgamate research between French foodways and Louis XIV.

The second medium of research that was conducted was library research at The University of Iowa library. There were certain books such as *Le Cuisinier François* written by François Pierre de la Varenne (1651) that were not available online but were found during archival research at the library. The library research also provided me with books about foodways that were not available online.

### **Structure of Thesis**

This thesis comprises six chapters. Each builds upon the other both theoretically and empirically.

Chapter 1 begins with the argument that food was a significant medium for the construction of power and hierarchy. This argument is important for the analyzation of the banquets held by Louis XIV. It also presents how food will be used to examine further theoretical frameworks regarding power and hierarchy.



Chapter 2 analyzes two sets of literature that discussed French foodways and Louis XIV respectively. From these sets of literature four main themes on the concept of food have emerged. The first advocated that food was part of one's identity and was essential in the identity of a nation. The second postulated that etiquette was a fundamental element in French foodways. The third showed that food preparation was a way of imparting knowledge to those who did not properly train as a cook. The fourth claimed that taste was significant in understanding views about hierarchy and society.

The literature review also highlights the gap in research between French foodways and the reign of King Louis XIV. It examines what areas can be contributed to from this research and how the arguments from the literature can be strengthened.

Chapter 3 argues how food and foodways permeated French society and culture during the seventeenth century to impact upon its practices of creating and maintaining power as well as hierarchy. It highlights Louis XIV's feasting habits throughout his reign and why banquets were used as a way to manipulate others. It also looks into what these banquets meant for the rest of the court.

Chapter 4 examines five frameworks that will be used to examine food and power. The first analyzes how King Louis XIV used banquets as a display of wealth and excess. The second defines power and hierarchy and establishes how they were created through food. The third works to examine The Civilizing Process as termed by Norbert Elias (1978) in relationship to hierarchy and the ways that mealtimes conveyed social relationships. The fourth framework postulates that class could be determined by taste. The fifth argues that commensality evoked power through the shared meal and feeling of inclusion. These five concepts are applied to the study of food to analyze the ways that Louis XIV used banquets as a medium of manipulation.

Chapter 5 focuses on three major case studies concerning the symbolism of food, French cooks, and etiquette surrounding King Louis XIV's banquets. The first case study analyzes the deeper meanings of French food other than its inherent use as nutrition. The second case study presents how French cooks were mediators of power and hierarchy through food. The third case study examines how etiquette during Louis XIV's banquets was fashioned as a way to show power while eating.

Chapter 6 concludes by looking at the ways that banquets have acted as a medium through which power and hierarchy can fluctuate. This chapter considers how Louis XIV was successful in this endeavor towards attaining absolute monarchy. It provides how food is an essential part in understanding larger social concepts such as the reign of King Louis XIV.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

Although food and foodways are relatively new areas of study, they have become significant to understanding the everyday lives of people<sup>1</sup>. Food studies were previously overlooked because eating and drinking were perceived to be seemingly mundane acts in everyday activities of no importance. However, it is the mundane, everyday activities that are the reality of cultural practices. This oversight in food studies meant that core cultural practices in any given society or group were not understood.

This chapter examines the literature that has been published on the topic of French food and the reign of Louis XIV respectively. Four main themes of discussion have emerged in the body of this literature. First, are those who have pursued how food is intertwined with identity. This has been asserted as vital for understanding how French society is reflected through its dishes and has become a national identity. The second theme is literature revolving around conversations that have developed from studying French etiquette. The third theme is cooking methods that were published during the time of Louis XIV such as cookbooks. Recipes provided the lens to how identity was engrained into society through the recipes that were written. The final theme that prevailed in the published literature is on the study of taste and what could be said about society by its taste.

### **Societal Identity**

Published works that have discussed the ideas around food as an indicator of identity are Priscilla Ferguson (2006), Jean-Louis Flandrin (1996), Lawrence Schehr (2001), Allen Weiss (2011), and

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<sup>1</sup> According to Mintz and Du Bois (2002: 99), food studies became more recognizable after the 1980s as a field of study.

Norbert Elias (1978, 1983, and 1998). Ferguson (2006), who studied French cuisine from the time of the Ancien Régime in *Accounting for Taste: The Triumph of French Cuisine*, argues that French cuisine became a sole factor in how the French identity themselves as a nation. Other authors such as Flandrin (1996), Schehr (2001), and Weiss (2011) have focused on French nationalism through mealtimes and dishes. These works provide a guide to how French foodways have impacted culture. Norbert Elias (1978) contributed to the conversation around society and ways of maintaining it. He was a German sociologist who wrote several books about European society evolving around court life and the development of social structures. His treatise involved discussing how mannerisms, violence, and bodily functions were mediums into a “civilizing process” (1978) to attain what was perceived as a civilized nation. In Elias’s book entitled *The Civilizing Process* (1978) discusses the steps towards an ideal society that functions on high levels of civility. This “civilizing process” (1978) focused on the seventeenth century when processes were becoming standardized and unified. This was a significant concept for how the cooking processes became “civilized” and what was considered to be high or low status.

## **Mannerisms**

Etiquette around the table in seventeenth century France was an important aspect to the civility. There have been numerous scholars who have studied this, but this thesis will focus on a few significant ones. Literature written on the subject of French etiquette includes the works by Jean-Louis Flandrin (1996), Jean-Louis Flandrin and Julie-Johnson (2007), Susanne Groom 2013), and Stephen Mennell (1996). In her publication, *Mealtimes in France before the Nineteenth Century*, Flandrin (1996) discusses a history of how mealtimes have transformed throughout time and the meaning behind these changes. Flandrin and Johnson (2007) in their co-publication, *Arranging the Meal: A History of Table Service in France*, address French mealtimes with a

focus on the events that take place at the table and how table service explicitly has become part of the symbolic presentation of power. Other publications such as *At the King's Table: Royal Dining Through the Ages* by Groom (2013) and *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present* written by Mennell (1996) discuss banquets in Europe throughout the middle ages as celebratory meals. Together, these provide comprehensive studies of the history of dining in France in comparison to other European countries. Overall, etiquette and mealtimes have been well studied. Nonetheless, they fail to tell why knowing these types of mannerisms are important and how that assists in understanding broader concepts such as power and hierarchy.

### **Food Preparation**

There were very few cookbooks published until after the seventeenth century in France. The publication of *The French Cook* by Francois Pierre De La Varenne (1651) was influential to the up rise of French cuisine. As one of the very first French cookbooks, it acts as a standard for which following cookbooks would be written. La Varenne ([1651] 2006: 96) provided apt discussion of what types about foods should be used, how to cook them, and what makes a good chef. This work provides a primary source of how cooking was thought of at the time of Louis XIV. While La Varenne provides an excellent source of details such as ingredients and cooking, the work is meant to be read as a cookbook and does not frame the ways of thinking about food or foodways.

### **Taste**

The idea of taste has been studied by three major scholars, namely Claude Lévi-Strauss (1997), Pierre Bordieu (1984), and Paul Freedman (2015). Lévi-Strauss (1997) who was a French

anthropologist, produced literature discussing the theory of structurasm. In his article, "The Culinary Triangle" (1997) he used food as a point of origin for the understanding of cultural practices. He used this conceptual framework to argue about the transformation of food during cooking and what it could explain about culture. His framework will be used in this thesis to discuss the evolution of French cooking. The work of Bordieu's (1984) *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* served as a way to understand hierarchy through taste. His argument examines how taste can serve as a distinction of class and vice versa. He defines what constitutes as "high taste" and "low taste" in terms of status which was used to understand the hierarchy of food. Another way to determine social class during banquets was who the meal was shared with. A more recent contribution to the ideas around food sharing is commensality and the different types that can be found during specific events. In *Commensality: From Everyday Food to Feast*, Freedman (2015) discusses the kind of commensality found in banquets and how that contributes to the ideas around sharing food. This concept is particularly important because the king's banquets are not open to just anyone and the sharing of a meal implies certain obligations towards one another.

It is important to note that all of these works have contributed to the conversations in food studies. The literature published on French cuisine from different perspectives has aided in the holistic interpretation of food. In order to study how food served at the court of Louis XIV influenced French cuisine, a variety of literature must be taken into consideration.

### **Chapter 3: Background**

This chapter examines the reign of King Louis XIV as well as the context through which food became a significant manifestation of his power. A historical background must be taken into consideration to provide context for banquets and how social hierarchies in France at the time of Louis XIV were structured since the topic cannot be studied from present day observation. The social and cultural factors that impacted the reign of Louis XIV often also impacted food and foodways.

King Louis XIV, or the “Sun King”, reigning from 1643-1715 became king at the young age of four when his father, Louis XIII died leaving the country in the hands of Queen Anne of Austria and Cardinal Mazarin to rule until Louis XIV was old enough to do so. Once he was able to properly handle his position, he focused on gaining power through aristocrats who had heavy authority over society rather than working from the bottom up. According to Blanning (2003: 100), “French nationalism only endured while Louis XIV was king because only he could represent the monarchy effectively”. He created spaces for the growth of arts and literature while simultaneously gaining political strength within Europe as an absolute monarch. This led to his well-known lifestyle of displays that were meant to stand out amongst other royalty.

Although Louis XIV was the heir and rightful owner of the crown, his young age prevented him from being able to access that position until much later. Cardinal Mazarin acted on behalf of the king until his death in 1661 which resulted in the sole rulership of the king. By that time, Louis XIV had experienced privation during the Fronde, when the nobles and Paris parliament rose against the crown in 1648 leaving him in poverty until Mazarin eventually regained power. This was unforgivable by Louis XIV and resulted in the absolute monarchy that

was led by the state rather than the church. Between the years 1667 and 1697, Louis XIV had extended the French borders through a series of wars and later led the War of Spanish Succession (1701-1714) which created an alliance between France and Spain. Beyond these political strategies, the reign of The Sun King resulted in the domination of the French language, an increase in education, and the development of libraries, all which were possible because of the division between church and state. These state-controlled entities became symbols of the absolute monarchy and his belief that he was God's representative. The basis for which his accomplishments were achieved was the supreme control over the entire country and its people. Blanning (2003: 99) states that, "to control the royal court the King built Versailles and made it explicitly clear that he was the sole representative of French culture". Versailles acted as a manifestation for the embodiment of what France was. In 1709 towards the end of Louis XIV's life, France faced a harsh winter that was followed by a national famine. The lack of food security and money led the working class to rebel and express their dissatisfaction with the lavish lifestyle of the king. Food rioters were the start of social and economic breakdown that gained the attention of the government (Sanyal: 2002, 24). The years of ultimate power over the people had ended and Louis XIV was forced to face the consequences of his rule.

While King Louis XIV was known for many reasons, one was the extravagant banquets and dinners held at Versailles which became the center of all court life. These types of feasts were not a new practice, they had been popular throughout Europe and continued on from the Middle Ages as a way of celebration for royal families. According to Wittmeier (2010: 101), an average meal at Versailles for Louis XIV lasted 45 minutes and involved himself, his wife, children, grandchildren, and over 100 spectators who were allowed to watch the king eat while remaining completely silent until he was finished. Over 500 people could be involved in the preparing,



serving, and cleaning of one banquet at Versailles (Wittmeier: 2010, 101). This was possible because of the structure created at Versailles and the access that Louis XIV had to skilled laborers.

Banquets were more than a good time for those attending. They became a way for the host to show excess wealth to impress guests and sometimes even gain political status. Louis XIV especially enjoyed eating and the type of lifestyle that allowed these feasts. His stomach was said to be three times the size of an average adult (Wittmeier 2010: 97). His love of food transformed the way that French cooking evolved and how meals were served by demanding what was perceived as a more civilized manner of feasting. Along with the food, there would be dancers, musicians, or preachers for the guest's entertainment, often times with the hope of 'out-doing' another banquet feast that had been held in the past (Trewin and Beam 2001: 16). If the king were to not be able to deliver a better dining experience than in the past then that may signify a loss of power or resources to his guests. These types of feasts were not a new practice, they had been popular throughout Europe and continued from the Middle Ages as a way of celebration for royal families.

Court life in Versailles during the reign of King Louis XIV was shaped by his want for the most grandeur lifestyle and power. The building of the Palace of Versailles itself and the especially lavish gardens are just two examples of how this power was carried out. Along with bringing in exotic plants for the gardens, The Sun King demanded orange trees that not only were unsuitable for the climate of France. In order to do this, he had to have some of the most talented gardeners. As King, he wanted to show that he had the power to demand certain types of foods and have hundreds of people participating in the preparation of the food.

## **Chapter 4: Theoretical Framework**

In order to understand how food can act as a manifestation of power, it is important to understand the conceptual ideas about foodways that have been discussed by various scholars. The different frameworks for thinking about mealtimes in France have provided an ample foundation for which further gastronomic study can be built upon. The aim of this chapter is to bring together these ideas and concepts into a holistic approach to better understand the impact of food and foodways on power and hierarchy during the reign of Louis XIV.

Before any concepts can be understood, the meaning and characterization of banquets need to be defined. Since banquets were used by Louis XIV, they are imperative to understanding how food was a manifestation of power. Equally important were the ways that power and hierarchy were understood by the people of France and the ways that they can be seen through levels of society. Following the topics pertaining to banquets is “the civilizing process” termed by Norbert Elias (1978) and the transformation of French society. This process provides the framework to understanding how transformations in society lead to transformations in taste and eating. Taste is a both an individual and societal notion which will be discussed through these frameworks. Finally, this chapter will examine commensality and the ways that it influences eating during a banquet.

### **Banquets**

Banquets were a culinary feat that involved preparing copious amounts of various dishes that were not served during an ordinary meal. The food used needed to be difficult, rare, and expensive such as meat, game, large saltwater fish, or rare spices (Freedman 2015: 101).

Banquets were prominent throughout Europe and most often contained buffets so that one could

eat at one's own pleasure. Modest consumption was rejected in order for a banquet to fulfil its purpose as a display of power. Although the banquets held by Louis XIV were the ultimate presentation of abundance, nobles who held their own competed with each other in order to gain recognition that derived from hosting a similar meal to the king (Freedman 2015: 99). This act of hosting a banquet indicated a certain amount of excess wealth which was related to power and status. The servers at these meals were a mixture of permanent staff and noble courtiers. The court staff served the women guests and the nobles and courtiers who were rich enough to pay to wait on the king's table served the men (Trewin and Beam 2011: 16). Within one dining experience, there were several different layers which offered opportunities for showing off to fellow noblemen. However, the most important factor was that the king was always at the top of this hierarchy.

Banquets acted as a way to impact how order throughout the rest of the court was maintained by portraying the hierarchy of those who attended through seating and order of being served. The ways that the meals of Louis XIV were carried out signified the collectivity while his own tastes were catered thus constraining the taste of others, "Yet the more ritualistic the dining procedures, the more social and less individual the behavior becomes and the more potential individual anarchy is constrained by social imperatives" (Clark 1975: 32). The banquet meals served as prerequisites to the kinds of dishes and practices that are held today. Although there are not kings and courts displaying power in modern day, the historical background of French cuisine has influenced its importance in the culture and how power has been manipulated through foodways.

## **Power and Hierarchy**

King Louis XIV was able to manipulate the royal court and French citizens because he was in a position of high status. Freedman (2015:103) states that “internal distinctions matter in regard to hierarchy”. Therefore, the hierarchy amongst the upper classes in France would have recognized how their place in society related to the kings and honored his status. This would be apparent throughout banquets when Louis XIV would be inviting his guests to share a meal with him. The guests would then be in a position of debt to the king. As king, Louis XIV had the power to act without many consequences which was the basis for the *ancienne regime*. According to Morgan et al (2008:4) we can “understand power in terms of capacity to mobilize, control, and deploy resources – be they economic, political, cultural, or indeed moral”. These resources would have been controlled by Louis XIV, but decisions made by him would eventually reach all classes of society. Banquets provided a medium through which King Louis XIV could assert power over his guests because of the food he had provided them.

### **The Civilizing Process**

Food can be a mundane part of everyday life but within each meal there are many identifiers of the economy, society, and politics. France has a particularly rich culinary history through which theories of society can be looked at especially during the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the ideas surrounding social class and state power were beginning to change. It is no surprise that King Louis XIV was powerful, but the ways that his power was manifested in the everyday lives of people shows the extent of his rule. In order for society to change and develop new sets of ideas and habits, they had to be engrained into all parts of society whether large or small. In regards to the ways the civilizing process integrated into society, Lewis (1991:799) suggests that,

In any case, the economic hegemony of the bourgeois class is what gradually enables it to coerce all facets of society into the civilizing process. Bourgeoisified

civilization ultimately entails making the acquisition and internalization of the class values, feelings, and standards of conduct a matter of course, an unconscious and seemingly natural experience for children growing up in a society.

The younger generations begin to learn how to act and what is proper from everyone in the society which leads to more and more engrained civilization as time goes on. The shift from an individual to group mentality during this time period involved the power of social groups in order for others to conform to their ideas. Food and foodways in France provided a medium through which the civilizing process could take place while creating new standards of etiquette.

The seventeenth century encompassed many different social shifts from what has been termed as “medieval” to modern-day France. This shift to conformity and self-regulation is termed by Norbert Elias as the “civilizing process”. The ways that French society has progressed through time is through “(1) the social and psychological existence of individual and groups in their everyday life, their habits, customs, fears and anxieties, and (2) the political and economic existence of feudal estates and modern nation-states understood as monopolizers of power” (Lewis 1991: 797). The combination of individual and group changes creates a larger societal mentality. It is described by Elias (in Lewis 1991:797) in three sections of time leading to the modern day. The first, and most “primitive” time is the medieval period of *courtoisie*, the second is an intermediate early modern period of *civilité* from the 15<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and lastly is the modern period of pervasive normalization and conformity (Lewis 1991: 797). Through the 16<sup>th</sup> century, there are rapid developments of thoughts and ideas that led to a completely different standard of taste, table manners and expectations in French foodways.

## **Taste**

Anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984) discussed how the distinction of taste can classify an individual as either being high class or low class. His ideas of taste and social hierarchy have been the framework of food studies over many years and suggest that it is the type of food that is served that distinguished a banquet the most from any other feast. However, taste was not the single factor in what distinguishes a person's class. It influenced how others perceived someone and enabled a false judgement in order to gain temporary status. The societal aspect of banquets heightened the notion of status and, "it has long been known that wine and food socialize taste" (Weiss 2011: 76). When people, particularly those of higher classes who were more likely to be in positions of certain rank are together, they sought out ways to differentiate themselves through taste. The types of food and taste of what was considered "high class" are important to this study and how certain exotic foods were used as displays of power or to show an excess of wealth to create a certain identity.

The distinction of taste can be directly examined by the cooking process. Claud Lévi-Strauss (1997:36), a French anthropologist, argued that cooking is "...with language a truly

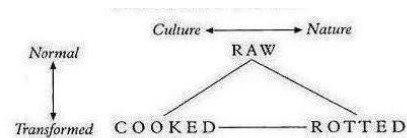


Figure 1: The Culinary Triangle (Lévi-Strauss 1997)

universal form of human activity...". In order to substantiate this idea, he proposed "the culinary triangle" (see Figure. 1),

that explains the notions of culture and nature through raw,

cooked, and rotted food. The cooked food is seen as a

cultural transformation of the raw, whereas the rotted is a natural transformation. The continuum between culture and nature suggests that cultural aspects surrounding food vary greatly but the natural state will remain constant. The culinary triangle is valuable in understanding differences between groups and also the ways that changing the natural state of food can signify a different meaning.

## **Commensality**

The act of eating together and sharing food, even in a large quantity such as banquets signals a certain social relationship amongst the participants. Commensality is the act of eating at the same table and demonstrates how the partaking of such a feast is reliant on social ties. As Van Esterik (2015: 37) mentions, “feasts are a form of political commensality where questions of hierarchy and trust must be addressed before food can be shared”. In other words, before the food has even been served, certain levels of status have already been distinguished. Even though eating is a social activity, it is typically not shared with strangers in the same way as close companions. According to Freedman (2015: 99), banquets are a more complicated form of commensality than celebrations that exceeds the “normal” boundaries of food supply and appetite. This further accentuates that although there is excess, it is not accessible to everyone. There are however, different commensal circles within one banquet. As Donahue (2003: 434) states:

It is precisely by crossing such borders that transgressive commensality maintains them. Extreme examples of this form of dining are typical of hierarchical societies. They might include the "invitation au chateau" (invitation to the manor) or a politician lunching with workers at the factory. In modern sociological terms, three features are common to this activity: (1) the asymmetry of the relationship between the superior and the inferior diners; (2) the need for the dominant host to be recognizable among his guests, offering himself in the process as a "gift" to the diners for a certain period of time; and (3) the requirement that the dominant party eat the same food as everybody else in order to show that he recognizes common needs and tastes.

The ways that commensality was carried out was not always noticed, but rather engrained into society as a habit. Sharing meals together meant that there was some type of social relationship with that person or people. Often, but not always, there is a sense of obligation to the host which will later be re-paid in either gifts or the reciprocity of an invitation to a banquet. In the case of Louis XIV, the attendance to his banquet meant the generosity would eventually need to be returned by political or social favors



## **Chapter 5: Case Studies**

### **Symbolism of Food**

Food and foodways have the ability to be uniting or dividing in a way that shows how an individual or group is marked socially. They can also influence how certain groups are related to one another. French culture revolved greatly around its cuisine and the processes leading up to the actual ingestion of it making it the perfect example of these social relationships. As Ferguson (2006: 2) suggests, “France and its culinary customs, or foodways, are emblematic of a distinctive, highly constructed, and sophisticated conception of food with a special emphasis on its role in cultural understandings”. It is not only the actual food itself that French culture is proud of, but the way that it is eaten and the entire experience surrounding it, “novelty was by and large not a valued quality in the societies of this period: innovations, particularly in social customs such as eating and drinking, were thought of as potentially dangerous threats to the established social order” (Cowan 2007: 214). In an attempt to maintain the society and culture that existed, this more closed mindset and veneration of antiquity evolved by those who were not in favor of the civilizing process. The efforts to maintain the engrained habits of eating and cooking while evolving into a modern society forced an approach to food that was more symbolic rather than simply a means of nutrition.

The gastronomic field took shape in two major phases: emergence over the first half of the 19th century, consolidation thereafter. The resulting cultural formation carried “French cuisine” well beyond a circumscribed repertoire of culinary products to comprehend the practices and products, values and behavior, rules and norms, institutions and ideas that are attendant upon the preparation and consumption of food in this particular social setting. The

gastronomic field turned a culinary product into a cultural one. This cuisine became “French” as it had not been in the 17th and 18th centuries when the culinary arts were associated with the court and the aristocracy, not the nation.

France has a particularly intriguing culinary history because food is deeply rooted into the history and culture. This has occurred because of the extensive training that French cooks have to complete and because eating has been interpreted as a communal activity. Meals are considered “good” when time and effort has been put into them. According to Ferguson (2006: 4), “as an emblem of French civilization, cuisine ran right up there with cathedrals and châteaux, recognized by citizen and visitors alike as somehow intrinsically French” (Ferguson 2006: 4). Whereas commensality and eating have been ignored by other societies as integrated values of society, French culture has incorporated it into its identity. There are various dishes that have continued to prevail into the twentieth century that were created by them as this transformation was taking place. It is not so important that the ingredients themselves were French. Instead, it was the way it was made, the preparation process, the presentation, and the details that made it unlike other recipes. In virtually all of these instances, “French” was not a geographical but a social reference, and French cuisine was French by virtue of the court and the aristocracy” (Ferguson 1998: 620). The notions surrounding French food involve the long history and compilation of many different ideologies along the way that are not specific to the types of food but rather what they stand for. As noted by Cowan (2007: 205), “by the age of Louis XIV, national differences were being more stridently mapped onto culinary practices, at least in the minds of the moralists who saw fit to comment on these manners”. It was imperative that each

nation define their cuisine, as it was a representation of the people and the embodiment of their values and culture.

There are several approaches to thinking about the ways that food embody significance, particularly one of power. The whole-body experience of food allows it to be a medium for determining health. As Woolgar (2007:167) explains,

In the Medieval West, it produced a common belief that the universe was made up of four elements, each of which had its own characteristics: fire (hot and dry), water (cold and wet), earth (cold and dry) and air (hot and wet). The human body depended for its existence of four related humours: choler or yellow bile, phlegm, black bile and blood.

The optimum state to maintain was for the body to be warm and moist, meaning that a balance of all elements would be needed. Foods could be altered by cooking them to change their state or make them more balanced. Likewise, “over-indulgence at the meal might produce an imbalance of humours” (Woolgar 2007: 168). This idea contrasts the superfluous manner of banquets where over-indulgence is common. That is to say, banqueting magnifies the fact that it is not meant to be healthy or reasonable.

The cooks and other various kitchen staff had to become familiar with the ways that food evoked a certain attitude or feeling so that when creating a meal, it was a wholly experience that did not prefer a certain flavor or humor more than another. They also needed to be aware of taste and what classifies as “high taste” as discussed by Bourdieu (1985). The specialization of cooking is not to be overlooked as Weiss (2011: 75) mentions,

We should remember that until the beginnings of industrialization in the early modern epoch, the majority of people were intimately familiar with the plants and

animals that were to become their food. Most contemporary urban dwellers do not have this luxury, and the sense of authenticity serves in part as a form of overcompensation.

Understanding the foods and their value was an important part of creating French dishes which added to the authenticity of it. Foods that were considered high status were thought of that way because they were exotic, difficult to make, or were one a kind of dishes specially created by cooks who worked for the royal family. As Groom (2013: 21) notes, “many spices had been newly introduced from the Middle East by the returning Crusaders”. Certain spices became important in healing the body but were still rare and expensive, meaning that the use of them in dishes other than medicinal was a sign of wealth and power.

Dining processes signify the commensality of a group but the individual markers that allow a hierarchy to stay in tact to restrain the amount of power attainable. According to Clark (1975: 32), “...the more ritualistic the dining procedures, the more social and less individual the behavior becomes and the more potential individual anarchy is constrained by social imperatives”. Another way the symbolism of food can be discussed is through the culinary triangle proposed by Lévi-Strauss (1997: 39), “this aspect takes on primary importance in societies which prescribe differences of status among individuals or groups”. Food and foodways became a medium through which hierarchy was be shown during commensal activities such as eating. The nature of sharing a meal together became unaligned with the cultural behaviors of building a hierarchy. While the king was in an absolute power status, his guests are in competition with each other for the resources of the king whether materially or in other ways. As Groom (2013: 10) states, “the monarch is in the unique and curious position of having no need to enhance his or her status and in theory, of being able to summon whatever he or she fancies to

eat, to have it prepared by renowned cooks and then wait (a moment or two) for it to be served up on silver-gild dishes”. It is in these ways that King Louis XIV asserted his power over others.

### **French Cooks**

The food that was served at banquets could only hold value if those attending knew the time and effort put into the preparation of it. Many of the dishes made for feasting required knowledgeable cooks who could ensure that the royal family and their guests delicious and beautifully presented food. Knowing how to best cook each cut of meat and choosing spices that would complement a dish were not tasks left to any kitchen staff. Chefs who worked for royal families such as at the Palace of Versailles were considered the elites and were the root of new techniques, dishes, and concepts revolving around food, “for a recipe never consists of a single instantiation of a dish, but is rather a template for variation, with the slight nuances entailed in repetition” (Weiss 2011: 75). Recipes were an important factor in relating food to identity because along with acting as instructions on how to make a particular dish, they also instructed how to achieve a particular taste and tell the cook what appropriate ingredients and techniques were and what were not (Ferguson: 2010, 102). Their ability to create unique flavors and combinations in order to ‘out-do’ what they had made for previous banquets made them in a sense in control of how the banquet was perceived, “A good chef, Cowan (2007: 212) argued ‘should lack all filth and dirt and know in a suitable way the force and nature of meats, fish and vegetables so that he may understand what ought to be roasted, boiled or fried. He should be alert enough to discern by taste what is too salty or too flat”. The knowledge of taste again becomes important when preparing food for a banquet. Louis XIV was not in the kitchens demanding what food was to be made, it was entirely in the hands of those who were expected to know what should be made and how.

There have been many scholars who attempted to categorize French cooking and the ways that it has changed into the epitome of gastronomic study. Maurice Edmond Sailland, better known as Curnosky (1872-1956), identified four types of French cuisine that encompasses the beginning of *haute cuisine* to modern day cooking. The first being *grande cuisine* which involves great chefs, culinary knowledge, and countless recipes founded on the personal genius of these chefs. The second is *cuisine bourgeoise*, or the pride of ancient families and their cooking techniques and recipes. *Cuisine régionale* included dishes from all 32 of the French provinces in order for the taster to experience an array of flavors and ingredients. Lastly, *cuisine paysanne* is impromptu cooking from what can be found in the kitchen at a moment's notice (Drouard 2007: 268-269). Much like the difference between a banquet and an everyday meal, each category of French cooking serves a different purpose. Other French cooks, such as Marie Antonin Carême (1784-1833), who was known for her *grande cuisine*, surveyed the procession of a meal, “accordingly, she simplified the meal—four courses for a formal dinner instead of the usual eight—and she pared down the banquets from those of her ancien regime predecessors, giving more space per person and placing fewer and smaller serving platters on the table, and so on” (Ferguson 1998: 614). This led to the beginning of a much simpler dining process that would become more common in the eighteenth century and beyond.

French cooks were among the highest paid domestic workers and were recognized as professionals although it was not a profession considered to be appropriate for study by early modern intellectuals. This indicates that unlike other household servants, there was a level of respect between the royal family and the cooks since, at the core of banqueting and eating, the food was to be enjoyed without the concern of it being poisoned or unappealing, “As the dinner table took on greater importance for the Renaissance elite society, the social role of the cook

should have increased proportionally as well. The cook had a reason to stake claim as a professional and highly valued member of court society” (Cowan 2007: 211). However, studying to become a cook was still considered manual labor for the working class and involved becoming an apprentice for another highly skilled and revered cook, “for many centuries in France the craft of cookery was the property of the certified master, the individual who had trained under a recognized older authority and received from him all the accrued truths and techniques passed down over the years from generation to generation, from master to apprentice” (La Varenne 2006: 53). The education of a French cook involved a type of apprenticeship underneath an already established cook for many years. After they had observed and been taught, the aspiring cook would have to continue working his way up to the position of head chef. Those who were in the kitchen were the ultimate establishment of modern French cooking and aided in the culinary shifts during the seventeenth century.

François Pierre (1618-1678), who would have been more well-known by his pen name La Varenne, was one of the most influential French cooks during this time of feasting. He first studied at the kitchens of queen Marie de Medici (1575-1642) of the House of Bourbon and then continued his career as *chef de cuisine* to Nicolas Chalon du Blé, Marquis of Uxelles for ten years before his books were published, making him more well-known in the culinary world. His book *Le Cuisiner François* (1651) was one of the first cookbooks ever written and acted as a guidebook for his fellow colleagues rather than to be used in the everyday household. It included recipes from the most mundane to more skilled and impressive dishes, many of which were short and to the point instructing on how to cook each ingredient rather than quantities. One of the most distinguishing features was the abundance of sauce recipes and ways that sauces were incorporated. La Varenne highlighted how important they were in transforming a dish. Other

recipes included an abundance of butter, creams, mushrooms, truffles, pepper and vinegar and were savory rather than sweet. In 1653 he published his second book, *Le Pâtissier françois* which instructed on how to create the existential French pastries. The instructional way that his books were written for other chefs in order to compile these recipes was the beginning of a standard form of French cooking.

La Varenne not only became a figure of importance in the culinary world because of the way the books were written, it was also for his creation of new words and techniques. “After La Varenne it would be customary for food writers, especially those concerned with cookery books and cooking manuals, to develop their own specialized, and almost always Francophone, vocabulary for discussing techniques of, and naming the ingredients in, their dishes” (Cowan 2007: 226). Examples of this include words such as ‘*ragout*’, meaning ‘stew’, or ‘*fricassée*’, which without direct English translation is a mix between ‘to fry’ and ‘to break in pieces’. Before he introduced these ideas, food was thought of as a means of nutrition without the creative aspect. He pushed cooking outside of a dietic world and into a field of its own that opened up debates and conversations around ‘proper’ cooking, “culinary tradition, assuming that contemporary practice in the kitchen represents a cumulative composite, is never questioned” (La Varenne: 2006, 97). He offered a space in the culinary world that allowed modern techniques to be combined with traditional foods and ideas. Another chef who helped open up this dialogue include Nicolas de Bonnefon who followed La Varenne with *Les Délices de la campagne* (1654). His specialty was simplifying the spices used to create tasteful, yet not overdone dishes.

A person’s rank in society could be clearly distinguished by what types of food they were eating, or not eating. Their taste was seen as a direct indicator of status. The food served at Louis XIV’s banquets would certainly be more lavish and presented in ways that the average working-



class or even noble would never experience. The chefs would request exotic foods from other countries or ingredients such as certain spices that were rare and expensive in order to please their audience. Some of the most common spices used in the French kitchens were *grosses espices* (ginger, cinnamon, pepper and grain of paradise) while *menues espices* (cloves, galingale, nutmeg and mace) were used less often, “the French use of spices was more subtle than the English” (Woolgar 2007: 180). The added flavor was especially important because of the lack of preservation techniques that were available in the seventeenth century. According to many cooks, there were eight flavors that a dish could be: sweet, greasy, bitter, salty, sharp, harsh, salty, vinegary (Woolgar 2007: 168). The mixing and matching of these flavors was important when planning the menu of a feast. In order for ingredients to be made into such ‘powerful’ dishes, they had to be combined and cooked in a way that is imbued knowledge about properly executing these recipes for a king such as Louis XIV, the chef would have been an important figure to the overall presentation of the food and led to a certain hierarchy of the kitchen (La Varenne 2006: 53). It was essential to not have too much of one flavor or organize them in a way that was not complementary to each other.

Although they had access to many different foods, French chefs were still limited in what they had access to each season. Several dishes included eggs and milk while few were fruit-based until the eighteenth century. Potatoes, tomatoes, and American corn (maize) were not introduced to Europe until the sixteenth century. Coffee, tea and chocolate were also introduced as a result of contact with the New World and were slow to be accepted or introduced into French cooking. Many cooks were hesitant to use these new foods as a way of conserving the early modern culture (Cowan 2007: 214). The incorporation of these newer items was available to the elite class only until they became staples in the French diet.

Meat was the center of many meals but particularly during a banquet. Higher classes had access to fresh meat unlike those who would have to cure the meat in order to preserve it. Louis XIV was an avid hunter and although he did not provide the meat for all meals, he did participate in that component of the meal. Pork and poultry were the main sources of game while beef was found less frequently, on days of abstinence, fish became the food of choice, although not the only option and “meat days” were considered to be Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday during fasting (Woolgar 2007: 166). The most common methods to cook were boiling, baking, roasting, frying and grilling. Eating roast foods was a sign of rank because it required a high quality of meat as well as quantities of fuel which is why many of the banquets included a roasted piece of meat for the centerpiece and several dishes on the side, “the French king was served three courses and his meat dressed after the French fashion and the King of England had the like after the English fashion” (Groom 2013: 42). Starting in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the consumption of whole animals or large parts disappears as it is seen as “animalistic” or “non-civilized” which led French cooks to begin cooking partial cuts such as a ham or a rack of ribs instead of a whole hog. The inclusion of meat during a banquet or meal held significance but it is important to note that this would not be the case without the addition of spices, other ingredients, or a skilled chef who knew how to perfectly cook the meat.

In the twentieth century, the first food item that would come to mind if asked about French eating would be the croissant and other similar pastries. They serve a multitude of purposes in the everyday eating habits of the French, but pastries have not always been a staple in their diet.

The main focal point and symbol of power at early banquets was the meat and heartier dishes that would serve to fill up the guests. Desserts were not an after-thought but certainly did not call for as detailed attention as the rest of the main meal. However, following the work of La Varenne and the establishment of cook books that opened up the culinary possibilities, desserts became more widespread as a creative display. The word itself has roots in the language that also explain their main purpose, “in French, the transformation of the word “dessert” from its origins in the verb

“*desservir*” (to clear the table) began in the seventeenth century” (Tebben

2015: 11). Rather than serve as a sweet end to the meal, desserts were

designed much like architecture and were made to hold their shape rather than taste good

although many of them did use an abundance of sugar (see Figure. 2). Various different kinds of cakes and marzipans were sculpted as a way to present the *chef pâtissier*’s work and of course to further elaborate the banquet feast. The ones that were meant for consumption were mainly fruit-based while continuing to act as a visual display, “later in the eighteenth century, there were clearer indications of an evolution in the conception of dessert from taste driven to visual as fruit began to be arranged in pyramids and towers of “*porcelaines*,” small dishes that were first made of tin or pewter (Wheaton 1996: 188)” (see Figure. 3). This shift from an artistic-only item on the table to a functional, yet still visually sufficient dish entwines the civilizing process and the progression of cooking even when it is for the kings. The impressive effort and knowledge of ingredients needed to make these desserts illustrate how certain dishes can create an illusion of



Figure 2: Displays such as this were not meant to be consumed (Tebben 2015: 16).

power and can be thought of as a marker of rank in society, “this duality [of dessert] is part of its



Figure 3: Displays of candied fruit  
(Tebben 2015: 14).

iconic character: that it is adaptable to high and low cuisine and “thinkable” at both levels” (Tebben 2015: 22). What makes desserts an exceptional sign of at least some wealth is their absence from nutritional value making them a complete extravagance. Their function is to delight both the eyes and the taste bud without needing to hold value beyond that, “the service *a la russe*`, temporally and spatially separating the sweet from the savory, provided the necessary organization of meals respectful of the irreducible

opposition between the two tastes.” (Tebben 2015: 12). The dichotomy between sweet and savory allowed for a distinction of taste between the middle of the meal and the end. For the banquets of Louis XIV, desserts completed the meal presentation as an indulgent creation of excess.

## Etiquette

Within the realms of the civilizing process, manners surrounding the table were important in establishing and maintaining status. Cowan (2007: 207) suggests that, “Renaissance notions of civility found an ideal space in which they could be articulated at the dinner tables of the European aristocracy as well as anyone else who wanted to be associated with this new civility of manners”. The new ways of thinking about civility were being seen in all aspects of society. Etiquette became a means of governing what is right or wrong. For example, excess was sought out, but over-eating was frowned upon. According to Groom (2013: 32), “above pride and next to sex, gluttony - when encompassed overeating, overdrinking, eating before grace, eating

without appetite, gobbling and not giving a share to the poor – constituted as a mortal sin”. The fine line between sin and splendor was where the banquets of Louis XIV were situated.

Beyond the show of Versailles itself and the gardens, inside the palace during Louis’s everyday life, mealtimes would have been an affair across the whole palace. Mealtimes were rituals that involved the King eating while everyone else watched until it was their turn (Flandrin, 1996). This gives a glimpse into the structure of court society and routine. According to Schehr & Weiss (2001), mealtimes in France were and are an art rather than fulfilling biological needs and food is the intersection of histories. The types of food Louis XIV and the rest of the court were eating will be extremely important in how this idea is fulfilled. However, as Groom (2013: 87) points out, “the object of all this trouble and expense was not primarily the king’s meal; he could eat anywhere. It was rather to show the king and his regal splendor, seated at a table of plenty. For this to be fully achieved, an audience was required, vetted to complete the illusion of grandeur”. The illusion, whether true or false, was the embodiment of the king’s power.

While the food itself evokes a degree of power, the presentation and ways of consuming it contribute to the high-status of a banquet. If a dish such as roast were not eaten properly or served in an acceptable way, it would not be recognized with the same significance as it would otherwise be. This begins with the seating, hosts, and workers. At Versailles in particular, the meal of the royal family was held at a separate table with food that was cooked in a separate kitchen than the remaining attendees (Freedman 2015: 103). This ensured that the royal family was not only publicly separate from their guests but also that their food was ultimately of such high quality that only a select few would have the chance to enjoy it. Elite households had a chamber usher and marshal for the dining hall to direct guests to their table (Cowan 2007: 207).

This was again to ensure the formality of the dining and to inhibit guests from wandering into rooms where they were not desired. The servers at these meals were a mixture of permanent staff, who served the women, as well as nobles and courtiers who were rich enough to pay to wait on the king's table and served the men (Trewin and Beam 2011: 16). Those who were serving the king and queen would not also serve their guests. All of the food that was meant for the king would be tasted prior to it being presented to him and all of his drinks tested to make sure that they were not poisoned.

Although these were minute details, they were constant reminders of who holds power and who does not. In this way, daily tasks such as eating become expressions of absolute power, so that even the types of dinnerware the court eats out of is chosen for them. This also meant that those with less power saw those mundane acts as a way for them to appear as a higher class than they actually were, “lesser nobles imitate aristocrats and bourgeois imitate lesser nobles, refinement and good taste diminishing as the models trickle down the social hierarchy” (Wittmeier: 2010, 102). This type of act was the same during banquets where there were more people and higher classes. Manners surrounding eating were important skills for the children of nobles to learn at a young age. The book, *De Civilitate Morum Pvenilium* (1530) by Desiderius Erasmus ‘on good manners for boys’ was circulated throughout Europe among the elite in order to educate future generations on how to behave at the table. It discussed topics such as the demonstration of one’s hunger, ‘table talk’, portions and dinnerware. These lessons were all to present oneself as a higher class and not to embarrass the host or guests, “animals fill themselves; man eats; the intelligent man alone knows how to eat” (Ferguson 1998: 617). Eating in what was perceived as a civilized manner was a way to establish rank or at the least, give the illusion of being part of an elite class. Even the king had restrictions as to what he should and

should not be eating. According to Groom (2013: 12), “from the Middle Ages, the king had at his shoulder, at table, his own physician, advising him on the benefits or otherwise of the royal diet”. Although he was often indulging in exotic food, there were still constraints to his diet.

Utensils and dining ware could also contribute to the experience of power during a meal. One would expect more exotic dishes and formal attire simply by glancing at the plates and silverware set out. Louis XIV was infamous for disregarding the social norms surrounding his dining ware, particularly the fork. Previous to the seventeenth century, many foods were considered decent to eat with the hands or with a spoon and fork. The fork was first reserved for the bourgeoisie classes but did not become popular until the later when eating with the fingers became distasteful, “the first recorded notice of a fork appears in fourteenth century Italy, but it was really only in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that the fork became a standard item at elite tables” (Cowan 2007: 207). This shift envelopes the civilizing process and the ways that it can be seen in a smaller, everyday scale. In regards to the adoption of fork usage, Elias (1978: 127) argues that,

The fork is nothing other than the embodiment of a specific standard of emotions and a specific level of revulsion. Behind the change in eating techniques between the Middle Ages and modern times appears the same process that emerged in the analysis of other incarnations of this kind: a change in the structure of drives and emotions.

The drive to become “decent” or “civilized” offset the traditional ideas and opinions that had prevailed until this point. Each individual was given a plate, fork, and spoon to signify good taste and decency during a meal. However, there is still a taboo around knives at the dinner table (Lewis 1991: 798). Knives were also a point of controversy, as they were seen to be a weapon,

although not as much of a taboo as forks. No matter what types of food were being eaten during these times, the way of eating them is what constituted this social change into a homologous eating habit. There are numerous accounts of Louis XIV rebelling this transformation, however, it is not known why. He is even said to have been appalled when his successors began to join in on the movement and continued to use just his fingers. Beyond the utensils, the dinnerware used at banquets was also an important distinction in class. The king's plate was gold, the princes was silver, and the utensils were a mix of either or (Wittmeier 2010: 102). The ultimate aim of these distinctions is to signify the hierarchy of the meal in an unspoken manner and in as many ways as possible. Not only is the food more at banquets "high-class", but also the way that it is served and the dinnerware that is being used. It is the combination of these that provide a way of displaying power and wealth that can be used to manipulate others.



## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Food and foodways have many implications beyond the physical human need for it. The way that French cuisine has evolved mirrors the evolution of social classes and ideas surrounding them. During the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the social changes towards a perceived civilized culture impacted the everyday lives of lower class citizens as well as the lives of bourgeoisie and even the King. The civilizing process described by Elias (1978) provided a way of understanding how the changes in French food and food ways occurred. The banquets held by Louis XIV exemplify the importance of power and hierarchy within an evolving society. French food and foodways during the seventeenth century changed in order to conform to the civilizing process and behaviors defined by the bourgeoisie class.

The reign of Louis XIV not only shows how symbolic power can be manifested through food, but also how food can permeate through to larger societal processes. This allows us to examine not only his power better, but also the power of food. By examining the food and foodways in the context of a historical background, it provides a comprehensive look at what was used to instigate power and because history has already happened, and the legacy of King Louis XIV is known. While feasting and food were not the only contributors to the power of Louis XIV, his affair with it motivated the transformation of cooking. Feasting, particularly during the reign of Louis XIV, exhibits larger concepts beyond the literal value of eating. By examining this, we can better understand the different manifestations of his power. Food and foodways have been discussed in a variety of contexts, both in France and elsewhere.

Banquets extended the boundaries of eating beyond what is needed for an everyday meal and into a symbol of power. This is shown from minute details to evident measures of influence.

By taking a biological need such as food and placing it in a context where it extends those needs, it pushes boundaries of social markers as well. These symbolic ways of thinking about food are seen throughout all processes of eating which contributes to the bodily experience. Not only were the ways of thinking about food important, the food itself and the ways that it was presented at the table were equally significant to feasting.

French cooks were the most influential figures in the process of feasts. When more discussion surrounding cooking became available through cookbooks, the role of the cook was regarded as more sophisticated. This led to more defined version of French food and specialized ways of cooking. The role of etiquette during banquets became important in order to prove that one was in the proper company and their seat at the table was correctly earned. As part of the civilizing process, the expectations for what is proper and what is not became standardized during the seventeenth century.

Louis XIV was known for his immense power and for his love of food. Examining the ways that power permeates into food and vice versus provides an insight of how each affects the other. Via an examination of the relationship between food and power, we have seen how each influences the other. The symbolism, cooks, and etiquette were all manifestations of power but were not direct influences as other, more obvious forms are. The mundane act of eating became an event that signified other meanings besides fulfilling a need, it became an opportunity to display wealth and civility. Through researching the food and foodways during the reign of Louis XIV, the influence of these banquets can be seen as indicators to larger societal process such as the attainment of power and the construction of hierarchy.

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